



Distress • Information Centres

SECTION A: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of the Distress Centre is to provide 24 hour phone service to anyone calling who needs information and support or who may be in crisis.

The volunteer\worker is responsible for providing a confidential, non-judgemental format to listen and provide information to women who may be calling about an abusive situation.

The volunteer\worker will be knowledgeable of the dynamics of woman abuse (see Approach Section) and be able to provide practical information as well as support.

There are four areas involved when addressing the needs of women calling distress lines or information centres:

- identifying if abuse exists
- assessing danger (imminent or possible) and responding appropriately
- intervention
- providing information

SECTION B: ASSESSING DANGER

Questions to be used by a worker when handling a crisis call with an abused woman in physical danger from her partner:

- Are you in danger right now?
- Are you afraid?
- Can you give me your name and address?
- Where is your partner now?
- Do you have injuries and are you in pain?
- Are there any weapons in the house?
- Can you get out of the house without getting hurt?
- Do you have children? Where are they? Are they in danger?

Questions to be used by a worker when handling a crisis call with a woman who is in emotional danger which could result in her physically harming herself or another person:

- Are you\have you recently thought about hurting or killing yourself?
- Can you give me your name and address?
- Do you have a plan? (for harm to self or others)
- Have you taken any medications? If so, what and how much?
- Do you have children? Where are they?



SECTION C: IDENTIFYING ABUSE

Women may call stating they are depressed, suicidal, lonely, isolated with no friends or family, etc. While dealing with the presenting problem the worker should be asking questions to encourage women to speak of the underlying problem which could be an abusive situation.

Questions that could be asked:

- Are you in a relationship?
- Are there difficulties in the relationship?
- Has your partner ever hurt you or threatened to hurt you?
- Can you tell me what happened?

If the caller says she has not been physically hurt, explore other forms of abuse with her (emotional, verbal, etc.) with questions such as:

- Does your partner yell at you?
- Does your partner put you down verbally?
- Are you afraid of what he may do?
- Does he make it difficult for you to see your friends and family?
- Does he make most of the decisions?
- Does he accuse you of being interested or involved with other men?
- Does he bring up your past against you?

During the conversation the worker will:

- listen effectively
- believe the caller without question
- let her know that it is not her fault
- let her know how much courage it took to disclose
- provide information on what help is available
- not criticize the offender but stress that it is the offender's problem
- let her know that she is not alone
- talk about safety for herself and her children

SECTION D: INTERVENTION

These questions are asked to determine the immediate danger to the woman (or harm to someone else) and if the police should be called irrespective of the woman's wishes.

Police should be called if:

- staff assess the woman and/or her children are in immediate danger
- the woman has taken medication
- the woman has a defined plan for harm to herself or others which she intends to implement immediately



Attempts should be made to keep the woman on the line while the call to police is made by another worker.

If the woman and her children are not in immediate danger, staff will encourage her supportively to utilize the criminal justice system if an assault has occurred.

Staff will also help the woman develop a safety plan for herself and her children, which can include:

- appropriate numbers and information
- escape routes out of the home
- always having a quarter for a pay phone and if possible money hidden to pay for a taxi
- if the woman has a car, a separate set of car keys hidden
- encourage her to think of a neighbour to whom she can go or who will appropriate action

SECTION E: RESPONDING TO THE ABUSIVE MAN

At times a man may call who has just assaulted his partner or whose partner has left him. He may sound remorseful, sad and depressed and some men become suicidal and/or homicidal when their partners leave. While these issues need to be addressed, there are very specific guidelines which need to be followed.

Men often seek support regarding why they are not "totally responsible" for the abuse and make numerous and repeated attempts to keep a conversation on this topic.

It is of critical importance that the worker does not collude with him around any blaming of the victim or removal of the total responsibility from him.

While this may appear to help someone who is suicidal, it increases the danger he poses to his partner and ultimately to himself.

Let him know it is his behaviour that is the problem, and that no matter what she has done or said, nothing justifies abuse.

If he has assaulted his partner let him know what he has done is against the law and he could be charged and arrested.

If the man is suicidal and makes statements such as "I can't live without her", "I need to find her or I will kill myself", it is not helpful to him and could be dangerous to his partner to become involved in trying to locate his partner, etc.

At this point it is important to follow the Distress Centre's guidelines and policies when dealing with someone who is suicidal.

**SECTION F: INFORMATION**

Workers will have information available to give to the woman at any time during the call. This should consist of phone numbers of the local shelter, counselling agencies, legal aid, social services, etc.

Workers will also provide basic information on legal rights, financial rights, and types of services that are available (see appropriate Protocol sections). It is not helpful to provide a number for a service that cannot be accessed immediately if the woman is distressed.

It is important for workers to encourage the woman to call back and let them know how she is, to keep the lines of communication open.

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